

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) An encoding device, including comprising:  
generating means for generating a header to which reference is made as needed during decoding;  
encoding means for encoding the header generated by the generating means and an input image signal, respectively; and  
outputting means for multiplexing the header and the image signal encoded by the encoding means and outputting a bitstream[[;]], wherein  
~~the encoding device being characterized in that~~ the generating means generates the header containing buffer characteristic information about buffering during decoding of the bitstream, and the buffer characteristic information contains all of a minimum bit rate  $R_{min}$ , a minimum buffer size  $B_{min}$ , and a minimum delay amount  $F_{min}$ , which are decodable during decoding of the bitstream.

2-5. (Canceled)

6. (Currently Amended) An encoding method, including comprising:  
~~a generating step of~~ generating a header to which reference is made as needed during decoding;  
~~an encoding step of~~ encoding the header generated in the generating step and an input image signal, respectively; and  
~~an outputting step of~~ multiplexing the header and the image signal encoded in the encoding step and outputting a bitstream[[;]], wherein

~~the encoding method being characterized in that the processing in the generating step~~  
generates the header containing buffer characteristic information about buffering during  
decoding of the bitstream, and the buffer characteristic information contains all of a minimum  
bit rate  $R_{\min}$ , a minimum buffer size  $B_{\min}$ , and a minimum delay amount  $F_{\min}$ , which are  
decodable during decoding of the bitstream.

7. (Currently Amended) A ~~storage~~ computer readable medium in which storing a  
computer-readable program which when executed by a computer causes the computer to  
perform the steps of is stored, ~~the program including:~~

~~a generating step of~~ generating a header to which reference is made as needed during  
decoding;

~~an encoding step of~~ encoding the header generated in the generating step and an input  
image signal, respectively; and

~~an outputting step of~~ multiplexing the header and the image signal encoded in the  
encoding step and outputting a bitstream[[;]], wherein

~~the storage medium being characterized in that the processing in the generating step~~  
generates the header containing buffer characteristic information about buffering during  
decoding of the bitstream, and the buffer characteristic information contains all of a minimum  
bit rate  $R_{\min}$ , a minimum buffer size  $B_{\min}$ , and a minimum delay amount  $F_{\min}$ , which are  
decodable during decoding of the bitstream.

8. (Canceled)

9. (Currently Amended): A decoding device, ~~characterized by including~~ comprising:  
searching means for searching for a header in an input bitstream; and

decoding means for reading buffer characteristic information about buffering, ~~which information~~ contained in the header found by the searching means, and for decoding the bitstream in accordance with the read buffer characteristic information, wherein the buffer characteristic information contains all of a minimum bit rate  $R_{min}$ , a minimum buffer size  $B_{min}$ , and a minimum delay amount  $F_{min}$  which are decodable during decoding of the bitstream.

10-14. (Canceled)

15. (Currently Amended) A decoding method, comprising ~~characterized by~~ including:

a searching step of searching for a header in an input bitstream; and

a decoding step of reading buffer characteristic information about buffering, ~~which information~~ contained in the header found by the processing in the searching step, and of decoding the bitstream in accordance with the read buffer characteristic information, wherein the buffer characteristic information contains all of a minimum bit rate  $R_{min}$ , a minimum buffer size  $B_{min}$ , and a minimum delay amount  $F_{min}$  which are decodable during decoding of the bitstream.

16. (Currently Amended) A ~~storage~~ computer readable medium storing a program which when executed by a computer causes the computer to perform the steps of in which a computer-readable program is stored, the program being characterized by including:

~~a searching step of~~ searching for a header in an input bitstream; and

~~a decoding step of~~ reading buffer characteristic information about buffering, ~~which information~~ contained in the header found by the processing in the searching step, and of

decoding the bitstream in accordance with the read buffer characteristic information, wherein  
the buffer characteristic information contains all of a minimum bit rate  $R_{min}$ , a minimum  
buffer size  $B_{min}$ , and a minimum delay amount  $E_{min}$  which are decodable during decoding of  
the bitstream.

17-19. (Canceled)